WORK ADJUSTMENT IN
REHABILITATION

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Work Adjustment In Rehabilitation

LYNN G. KELLOGG

The past three years have witnessed a remarkable growth in rehabilitation programs for the blind both in scope and number. Following the passage of Public Law 113 in 1943, twenty-five states have either established *separate* vocational rehabilitation programs for the blind, or implemented services in already existing state agencies for the blind. It is gratifying that many of these agencies went a step further by expanding their programs, through the use of state funds, to offer services to those blind persons who are in need of vocational rehabilitation, but not yet ready to benefit thereby. In the past, you will recall, many severely disabled persons were classified for various reasons as "non-feasible" for vocational rehabilitation service. It is now believed that many such persons can be given the preliminary preparation which will enable them to benefit from training and employment opportunities.

As a result of the man-power shortage during the last war and the unprecedented demand for labor, agencies for the blind were able to achieve industrial placement for a large group of selected clients. It was possible to place them in a wider variety of work situations than ever before because there was greater opportunity for demonstration of the many job operations which can be performed by blind people. Industry learned that the blind worker, properly trained and placed, could be just as efficient as his sighted fellow worker. We all know that the absenteeism and accidents among selected blind employees were practically nil. The nation is now again experiencing a surplus labor market and agencies for the blind are faced with the problem of holding the gains which were made by the blind during the war. It is now the responsibility of agencies for the blind to make certain that blind workers are properly equipped to hold their own in competition with sighted workers. In addition, they have the responsibility of providing employment opportunities for the larger group of blind persons not yet employed. In spite of the opportunities which existed during the war, there remained in the files of practically every agency a large group of "potential" workers who were not ready for placement because they lacked certain basic attitudes and skills required for successful employment. They are still with us. This group is in need of services which can best be given in a well rounded program of work adjustment.

This afternoon we would like to discuss with you the importance of work adjustment services in a rehabilitation program for the blind. By work adjustment, we mean those services which

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will enable the blind person to acquire manual dexterity, gain personal confidence and learn how to adjust himself socially to his fellow employees. This is a basic equipment in the conduct of any job performance. Such service should enable the blind person to enter and progress in a chosen vocation on an equal basis with the non-disabled employee. This basic preparation is necessary in a large variety of occupations. It may include preparation for skilled and unskilled operations, commercial employment, business enterprise, home-industry, etc.

Mr. Michael J. Shortley, Director of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, at a meeting of the Advisory Committee of Workshops for the Blind held in Chicago, November 25, 1945, had this to say in regard to the problem of providing work adjustment service:

> "Now this job cannot be accomplished by one agency or by one list of specific services performed by a particular agency. Rather it spreads itself over a wide variety of activities and services in many fields all tied together in terms of what it takes to develop and prepare a specific blind person for employment. It is my firm belief that workshops for the blind can and should play a significant role in this overall job. By a significant role I mean that the workshop should conceive of providing something greater than the few job opportunities it offers the blind for employment. Rather it should gradually conceive of itself as a preparatory and transitional center in relationship to the total employment world for the blind and not as the sole and total employment goal itself."

We believe Mr. Shortley has stated the problem very aptly. The task of work adjustment requires the utilization of all resources, and the combined effort of both public and private agencies.

Coordination of Services

The State Rehabilitation Agency should be entirely familiar with all the facilities throughout the state which can be used in the rehabilitation process. It is desirable to utilize and coordinate the services which are offered by the various agencies. This avoids unnecessary duplication of services. There are many agencies in the state providing specialized service which can be utilized in a program of work adjustment, namely: private and public programs for the vocational adjustment of the severely handicapped, psychological bureaus, consultation centers, family casework agencies, etc.

The private agency which administers a program of work for the blind is a very important resource in providing work adjustment service. It is generally local, but occasionally state-wide in scope. There are many advantages in using such an agency. The private agency usually carries a more limited caseload and has less turnover in its staff. It is generally, therefore, in a position to provide more intensive casework service to the individual. The private agency can make services available more quickly than the public agency as it does not have the rigid eligibility and clearance requirements which are generally a part of the public agency's procedure. It may consequently be able to assume emergency assignments which will relieve the public agency when it is under pressure. Since the private agency does not generally have as many specific regulations directing its work as do public agencies, it is frequently possible for them to do experimental work and to demonstrate

additional needs in the field in which both agencies are working. A very important service offered by the private agency is the interpretation both to the client and the general public of the services which are available from the public agency.

In Michigan there is a working agreement between the State Department of Social Welfare and the Detroit League for the Handicapped whereby the latter agency is providing a very extensive work adjustment program for the blind. The Detroit League for the Handicapped was one of the first private agencies in Michigan to establish a work adjustment unit for the severely disabled. A workshop is operated in conjunction with the work adjustment unit which provides employment training until such time as satisfactory adjustment is attained.

Another source of work adjustment service is the state workshop. State workshops, as a rule, have a greater variety of equipment than do the private agency workshops and can provide training in a variety of job processes which may be utilized for work adjustment training.

In arranging to use work adjustment services from either the public or private agency, it is desirable to formulate an operating agreement which will specify (1) the type of work adjustment services available; (2) the extent to which they can be provided; (3) the cost per trainee on an hourly, weekly or monthly basis.

Persons desiring the services which are made available by a work adjustment program will have varying needs. A good program will take into consideration each client's individual needs and will offer service accordingly. Among those who can benefit by a work adjustment program are the following:

1. The newly blinded individual who is learning to adjust to his disability and who wishes to focus on eventual vocational readjustment.
2. The young blind person who has no previous vocational experience.
3. The unemployed individual who has lived a routine of inactivity over a period of years, but desires to become employable.
4. The blind person whose previous work performance is unsatisfactory for reasons including:
   a. Insufficient skill for the job requirement.
   b. Poor work habits.
   c. Unacceptable attitudes.
   d. Low work tolerance.

The majority of factors to be considered in a work adjustment program are those related to the individual needs of the person for whom the service is being planned. It will, therefore, be necessary to make a careful diagnostic study of the client's personal adjustment, his attitudes and abilities as related to the vocational goal in which he is interested. The trainee's strengths and weaknesses should be determined and a program planned which will aim to develop his latent abilities. The greater the deviation from the accepted requirements for a particular vocation, the more intense the training and general case work service will need to be.

A Typical Case

In application of the principles previously outlined, let us consider a typical case: A young man who has been inactive over a period of years and is interested in industrial employment. He has average intelligence and manipulative ability. School records indicate a high degree of interest and ability in

shop work. He has had no work experience and very little social contact since leaving school. After a careful evaluation is made it is decided that a work adjustment program should include training which has the following aims:

1. Development of satisfactory work tolerance.
2. Acceptable standards in producduction skills.
3. Understanding the use of simple jigs, tools and similar devices.
4. Development of safety habits.
5. Knowledge of elementary first aid.
6. Ability to get to and from work without assistance.
7. Acceptable attitude toward supervision.
8. Understanding of shop organization.
9. Acceptance by fellow workers.
10. Acceptable attitude to work program.

A program may now be developed with the above aims in mind. Opportunities should be provided which will promote the development of skills, habits and attitudes in harmony with the client's vocational interests. A work program should be arranged which begins by utilizing first, only elementary skills. The time factor should be limited but extended as rapidly as the trainee's work tolerance increases. Projects should be arranged which become increasingly more complex as the trainee's skill increases. Every effort should be made to set up projects which simulate conditions found in competitive industry.

Much of the training, however, cannot be provided by mere manipulation of material objects. Modification of attitudes and habits can only be achieved by the trainee's understanding and acceptance of his problems as well as a desire to alter the previous pattern of behavior. The services of a skilled counselor are essential to provide consultation services on a day by day basis. Specialist services may be utilized as problems develop with which the counselor is unable to cope.

The content of the work adjustment program will, as we have said, vary in relation to the needs of the specific individual. Certain basic fundamentals may, however, be considered in developing individual programs. These may be summarized to include the following;

1. Accumulate as extensive data as possible to gain a complete picture of the client.
2. Evaluate his needs and potentialities.
3. Determine the minimum essentials of achievement for the specific vocational goal in which the client is interested.
4. Plan and develop the various phases of the work adjustment goal in the light of the client's individual needs.
5. Provide projects for the purpose of individual growth in areas required by the specific individual.
6. Arrange counseling program so that the trainee may be helped to recognize his problems and alter his behavior.
7. Provide for vocational planning as soon as the client has achieved an adjustment goal which is compatible with his vocational interest.
8. Continue vocational planning as soon as the client has achieved an adjustment goal.

The foregoing discussion attempts to show how the opportunities for the blind can be expanded.

A good work adjustment program is a fundamental step in the right direction.

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